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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES
FEBRUARY AS ABSTINENCE PROMOTION MONTH**

(Richmond, VA)—The Virginia Department of Health recognizes February as Abstinence Promotion Month and cites data from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that show sexual abstinence among teens has contributed to declines in teen pregnancy rates in the U.S.

“This delay in the initiation of sexual intercourse by teens and their increased use of contraceptives has led to declines in the teen pregnancy rate in the U.S. during the 1990s,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “We applaud teens who have chosen to be abstinent and the parents and adults who work to promote the abstinence message.”

Nationally, the proportion of never-married females 15-17 years of age that have ever had sexual intercourse dropped significantly from 38 percent in 1995 to 30 percent in 2002. For male teens age 15 – 17, the percent of those who were sexually experienced dropped from 43 percent to 31 percent. From 1997 to 2002, the pregnancy rate in Virginia has dropped 29 percent to a rate of 27.6 per 1000 female teens. During this same time the national teen pregnancy rate has declined 14.7 percent.

Abstinence is more than saying no to sexual activity. It is choosing to avoid risky behaviors and situations. More importantly it is about focusing on the importance of achieving self-sufficiency by completing milestones such as high school graduation, attending college or trade school and establishing a career. Abstinence education programs provide relevant information to equip youth to handle the personal, social and societal pressures to become sexually involved.

Many communities are helping teens choose abstinence by emphasizing abstinence in the school setting, supporting parents in their role as primary sexuality educators, offering programs and activities for youth and sponsoring public awareness campaigns. It is important to recognize the efforts of those community leaders, program providers and youth who promote abstinence as a prevention strategy for addressing adolescent sexual activity and its consequences.

“Through the Abstinence Education Initiative we are committed to providing the most relevant evidence-based programming and information,” said Gale Grant, M.A., program director. “Our Web site is a great place to learn about the initiative.” The initiative Web site offers teens, parents, educators and concerned individuals access to statistical data, resource materials and other pertinent information. Anyone interested in learning more about abstinence education is encouraged to visit www.canwait.com. There you can download Abstinence Promotion Month resources for promoting the message in your community.